

I'd Like to See Old Santa



The Wooden Soldier

By Margaret Kilbourne

In the poorer sections of the large city of Wentworth, Illinois, many little cottages were crowded closely together. Brown, black, and bare they always were, but on this, the day before Christmas, they seemed more so than ever before. About half-way down Eighteenth St., the eye of a shivering passerby might be arrested by a little cottage, which, although perhaps it was not in much better condition than the others, still stood out distinctly from them. Perhaps this was because the windowpanes, though broken, were patched with brown paper instead of stuffed untidily with old rags, as were those of the neighboring cottages. A wreath of holly hung invitingly in the window, and smoke curled comfortably from the chimney.

Seated before the fire in this cottage, was a rather old woman of about sixty. Her hair was white and her face wrinkled, but her eyes still glimmered with the joy of Christmas. She appeared to be staring vacantly at the wall, but was in reality looking back through the years to other scenes in other lands. This was what she saw.

It was Christmas Eve in a little cottage in Holland. She, Mrs. Thomas Bradstone, was seated by the fire, waiting for her husband's return from work. In the little wall-bed a small boy about four years old was sleeping peacefully. This was her son, Tommy. His stocking, hung for St. Nicholas, bulged with toys and sweets for the morrow. Over the top of the stocking peeped the face of a wooden soldier.

Then her mind sped on through the years to a busy scene in the harbor of Rotterdam. Her husband had died, and her brother, who was coming to America, had finally persuaded her to let Tommy, then about twelve, accompany him, in order that he might take advantage of the New World's privileges. Now she was bidding him good-by.

After about twenty years had passed, the news that her brother had died reached her, and she had set out to find Tommy. She had now been hunting for about five years, and had almost given up hope of ever finding him.

The fire suddenly crackled merrily, awakening her from her reverie. Sighing deeply, she took a newspaper from the table at her side, and slowly perused a column.

"Toys wanted by the Hospital of Mercy. Any contributions in fairly good condition will be very welcome. Call No. 100"

After thinking for a few minutes, she rose and went to a trunk in the corner. Lifting the lid, she found a package wrapped in white tissue paper, and returned to her chair. She reverently untied the blue ribbon which bound the package, and with trembling fingers drew from the depths of paper a wooden soldier, the same one which had peered so guiltily over the stocking top on that Christmas Eve of which she had just been thinking. She sat looking at it in loving meditation. This was the most loved of Tommy's toys; could she bring herself to give it away? No, it was impossible. She must keep it always. Then came the thought of Tommy's generosity. Once he had gone hungry that a poor little beggar might be fed.

Once he had trudged to school through snow in order that a little child, whose shoes were wearing out, might ride in the sleigh. Many such reminiscences passed through her brain, and then came the one which decided her. A poor little boy had been visiting him, a little boy whose parents

could only keep him clothed and fed, and who had no toys. Tommy had wanted to give him his soldier; surely he would want her to give it to these children.

Her decision made, she rose quickly to execute it, lest her sentimentality prevail against her will. Picking an old shawl over her head and slipping into a shabby coat, she fixed the dying fire, and, locking the door behind her, stepped out into the cold.

About an hour later she reached the steps of the Hospital of Mercy, and was admitted by an attendant, who said that he would call a nurse. She came, in due time, a pleasant young woman with a pleasant young woman with a mass of blonde curls. She asked Mrs. Bradstone what she wanted.

"Please, ma'am, I brought this for the children's Christmas. It was my Tommy's but I know he'd want me to do just what I am, or else I wouldn't be doing it." The brave old voice quivered, but did not break. "I must be going now, ma'am."

"Thank you," the girl said simply, pressing the woman's cold hand in her own warm one, "we appreciate it very much."

Christmas Day dawned brightly and happily inside the Hospital, if not outside it, and the atmosphere was filled with anticipation of the Christmas tree that afternoon. The president of the board of directors, Mr. Thomas Bradstone, was to be Santa Claus and distribute the presents. At last the long-hoped for time arrived.

The children were taken to the huge dining room on beds or wheel chairs, their faces alight with keen expectation. Shouts of laughter greeted the jolly Santa Claus, for Mr. Bradstone had forgotten the dignity of his position, and was gay and merry as a boy. Toy after toy was handed to the little hands so eagerly outstretched, and at last Santa Claus came to the last gift on the tree, the toy soldier. As he took it down his hands trembled slightly. How similar it was to that other wooden soldier! Where was his mother now? His last letters since his uncle's death had received no reply.

Carefully he looked at the soldier, and started violently. For there on the soldier's arm was a niche, an exact reproduction of one which he had made long ago with a jackknife. Or was it a reproduction? His glance fell on the card, a mere scrap of paper, which read "Mrs. Thomas Bradstone, 617 Eighteenth St." By an effort he controlled himself. After giving the soldier to a little boy, he slipped into the vestibule, and donning his heavy winter overcoat, rushed into the storm.

In her little cottage, Mrs. Bradstone sat again before the fire. It had long been her custom to sit on Christmas Day with Tommy's toys before her, living over again the past. But now the favorite wooden soldier was gone. What mattered that? It was probably fulfilling its mission by making others happy.

A low knock penetrated the stillness. On opening the door, Mrs. Bradstone stood for a moment, unable to distinguish anything from the blinding whirl of snow. Then, "Mother!"

"My son!"

In the Hospital of Mercy, a little boy cooed with delight over a wooden soldier, whose stolid face seemed to wear a victorious, satisfied expression, such as only one who has accomplished what he set out to do can know. And who shall say that the soldier, although wooden, had not accomplished its purpose?

Marie's Christmas

By Ruth Shepherd

Just a few more days 'till Christmas. How delighted and expectant everyone was. Children ran to and fro discussing Christmas and what it would bring. Grown-ups were as excited as the children. Christmas was in the air and the people seemed almost to breathe it.

In one of the department stores in a large city the sales girls were bubbling over with happiness. All but one. Marie, a dark complexioned girl about nineteen years old, but small for her age, hurried about with a sober face and rather a faraway look. What did Christmas mean to her? Five little brothers and sisters and an invalid mother to feed and clothe. Even their Christmas would be scant and for herself—she would have to go without this year.

Several of the girls were planning a good time for the holidays but poor little Marie must work. Dorothy and Maxine needed new dresses. Those would have to be made that day.

Marie was outlining the work in her mind and so did not pay particular attention to the money given her by the lady on whom she was waiting. She short changed the lady, but did not know it at the time and evidently her customer had failed to notice the shortage because she said nothing and soon left the store. That evening though Marie checked up her sale for the day she found her mistake. Not wishing to be dishonest she looked up the lady's address in the directory and then set out to rectify her mistake.

She had found Mrs. Brown, to be the name of the lady and on reaching Mrs. Brown's was admitted at once. As the servant ushered Marie into Mrs. Brown's presence the lady looked up and seemed rather surprised to find

Christmas Stories

by ABILENE WRITERS

The three Christmas stories printed today were the honor stories of the Abilene High School Christmas Story contest. Two prizes and three honors were awarded. These stories received the honor distinction.

that her visitor was a clerk of the department store where she did business. Marie did not hesitate but began at once to converse on the subject which had brought her on this visit. After Marie had finished her story Mrs. Brown said nothing for a moment, then said,

"Do you know that you could have kept that money for yourself and no one would have ever known? You know I am very rich and would not have noticed such a little mistake."

"Yes, but my conscience would have hurt me and I would always think of myself as a thief," Marie replied.

Mrs. Brown then asked Marie what she would like as a reward for being honest. Marie replied that being honest was the only reward she ever should ask for.

For the time being Mrs. Brown dropped that subject and inquired about Marie's mother and her brothers and sisters. Marie, after deciding that Mrs. Brown was really interested, told her that her mother was an invalid and could never walk until she had an operation. She also told how disappointed her brothers and sisters would be on Christmas morning because they could not have the presents they wished for. All the money received for her work was used to buy food and clothing and to pay rent for their home. There were not to be any gifts, but they had managed to get a little extra for the dinner on Christmas day.

Presently Marie arose to go home and Mrs. Brown said that she would see her again soon, but Marie did not know that Mrs. Brown was to lift a heavy load from her shoulders.

The next day, which was the last shopping day and the day before Christmas, was very busy. Everything was topsy-turvy and poor little Marie had very little time to think of her own troubles. All day she sold articles that she longed to take home to the children. That night she went home very tired, but she knew that she must explain to the children that Christmas because they did not have any money. How disappointed they would be! Christmas eve! And in this home sadness instead of gaiety. They made some candy and told several stories, but what child is happy on Christmas eve unless he knows that he will receive some little gift.

Next morning Marie arose early so that she could make the house as cheerful as possible before her mother and the children awoke. Suddenly a light knock sounded on the door and Marie looking rather surprised went to answer the knock. Again she was to be surprised for there stood Mrs. Brown with her arms loaded with packages. She told Marie that she had brought a little gift for each member of the family as a reward for Marie's honesty.

Marie invited Mrs. Brown in to enjoy the children's delight and

Mrs. Brown willingly consented. When the packages were unwrapped there was a big doll for Dorothy, a train for Bobby, a steam engine for Jimmy, a new dress for Marie, a set of dishes for Maxine, and a construction set for Carl. Just the things they had wanted. How do you suppose she knew what they wanted? Because she had been a child herself at one time. Now what had been sadness was gaiety. The children chattered, laughed and sang. All was sunshine again. They thanked Mrs. Brown over and over, calling her Mrs. Santa, and she enjoyed it as much as the children.

Just before leaving Mrs. Brown walked over to the couch where Marie's mother was lying and slipped an envelope into her hand, telling her that she too must have a Christmas present. After Mrs. Brown left, the envelope was opened. It was found to contain a check for one thousand dollars. A note was enclosed and Marie read the following:

"Please accept this little gift which I hope you will use to obtain the operation that you need."

"Sincerely,"

"MRS. BROWN."

This was all that was needed to make every member of the family happy as happy could be. The work that Marie had to do was no longer work, but was play. Her face instead of being sober beamed with smiles. Her mother was operated on and the doctor was certain that before many weeks had passed she would be able to walk a few steps. What more could she wish for?

The following day when she returned to work she met the manager of the store and he said, "Well, Marie, what does Christmas mean to you now?"

Marie studied a moment and then replied: "It means that I am the happiest girl in the world. It brought joys that never could have been found at any other time."

So my dear readers don't forget Christmas. It brings endless joys.

Christmas comes
But once a year,
But when it comes
It brings good cheer.

Alta's Horrid Xmas

By Estella Lambing

It was the Saturday before Christmas. The girls in the Boston boarding school who were going away for the holidays were hastily packing their bags. There was no happy preparation in Alta's room. Alta lay on the bed crying as if her heart would break. Ruth, her roommate, came running in.

"Why, Alta," she cried, "aren't you going to pack? What's the matter? You know the train leaves at 10:15."

"Oh, Ruth," sobbed Alta, "I just received a telegram from Mother and Daddy, sent at the last minute, saying Daddy had to

Things That Old Kris Brought



go away on business and she was going with him. Instead of going home as I had planned I must go to Aunt Nancy's in New Jersey. She's terribly old-fashioned and I know I shall have a horrid time."

"The idea!" exclaimed Ruth. "Well, I can tell just how you feel about it. But still it's not so bad. You might have to stay here at school. But you must hurry now. You just have half an hour to get ready."

Two hours later found a very lonely and unhappy girl getting off the train at the little rural station in New Jersey. There she found her uncle waiting to greet her with a big sleigh. He tucked her in the sleigh, spoke to the horses and they were off. Neither spoke during the trip. Alta was thinking of the good time she might have had at home. Soon they drove in at a large old-fashioned yellow farmhouse.

There was Aunt Nancy standing at the door to greet her. Soon Alta was smothered in her embrace. Aunt Nancy did not seem to notice Alta's lack of enthusiasm. She was conducted upstairs to a small cozy room on the second floor.

"This is your room," smiled Aunt Nancy. "Just make yourself at home and I'll go downstairs again."

When Alta had taken off her wraps she went downstairs.

"Come right in in the kitchen, dear," called Aunt Nancy.

Here Alta found a mixture of delicious odors to greet her. Her interest was aroused and she was immediately inflated into the mysteries. She stirred, sliced, pared chopped, and attended to all the minor details of the preparations. Aunt Nancy was busy plucking the turkey. Alta became so interested in the good things that she forgot to think of home.

At three o'clock the snowing

had stopped. Uncle John brought the sleigh out and Alta and he went to the woods to get decorations for the house. The pine woods were about a mile from the house. Soon they arrived. Alta jumped out of the sleigh to gather bright berries and leaves while Uncle John prepared to cut down a small pine for a Christmas tree. Alta was so busy that she did not hear Uncle John warning her not to go too far. She wandered about getting farther and farther away from Uncle John. The trees were very close together. Suddenly Alta stumbled upon a little clearing. In the center was a rude cabin made of logs. There were large cracks in the logs.

"A deserted house," cried Alta. "I shall just explore it."

And she walked bravely up to the door and pushed it open. A strange sight greeted her astonished eyes. In a corner of the

Alta cooked some warm food and gave it to the children. The doctor told them that the woman was not sick but was just cold and hungry.

The children were soon bundled off to bed and Uncle John set up the Christmas tree while Alta made the rest of the house as cozy as possible. She hung the wreaths in the windows and dressed the tree in tinsel and bells. The toys were hung on the tree and piled about it. Uncle John had remembered to get some candy and nuts in the village.

"Now I guess we have it all done," said Alta. "Doesn't it look cozy?"

"It certainly does," agreed Uncle John. "But it is time my little girl was in bed."

"That night a very tired but happy girl climbed the stairs to bed.

"I hope the children like their

THE REFLECTOR wishes all its readers a most enjoyable Christmas Time, with all the happiness that Christmas implies, and hopes that to each may come a full realization of the joys of the holiday season. It appreciates the patronage of the past year and hopes to continue to merit the good will and confidence of all for the "old home paper." After all, it is the home folks and the home things that appeal to us most and their doings and their experiences are closets to our hearts. In those are we interested always and from the "old home paper" do we gain the information that helps make life pleasant. Especially is this true at Christmas time, when home ties are strongest of all the year. A Merry Christmas to all!

room was a sick woman lying on toys," she thought as she fell on an old bed. There were three asleep.

The next morning Alta was up bright and early. She wanted to go over to the cabin and see the table, an old stove and some old children receive their presents.

"But you must not stay too long, dear," warned Aunt Nancy. "Be sure to bundle the children up good when they start over here."

Alta agreed and she and Uncle John went over to the cabin. The children were just awake as they entered and were blinking in surprise at the pretty things. Soon they sprang out and ran with cries of delight to inspect the toys. The woman tried to express her delight and gratitude but Alta would not listen to her.

Then the children were dressed and everyone bundled up and piled into the sleigh. When they got to the farm house they found Aunt Nancy busy getting dinner. She greeted the visitors cordially and soon made them at home.

Then came the old fashioned Christmas dinner. When everyone had eaten all they could possibly hold they all gathered about the fireplace in the living room. The children were popping popcorn on the fire.

"We were not always poor," remarked the woman whose name was Mrs. Nelson. "We lived in a nice house in the village. My brother who lives in the South sent us enough money to make us comfortable. But suddenly his letters stopped about a year ago. I was not able to pay the rent and so we had to move. A kind lady gave us the cabin to live in. I have not been able to locate him but as soon as I do I shall tell him of your kindness and I know he will not let Alta go unwarded."

That night the visitors were taken home. They all agreed that they had had a very happy Christmas.

Two weeks later Alta received a letter from Nashville, Tenn. It was from a Mr. Walters who Uncle John made a roaring fire. proved to be the lost uncle. In the old-fashioned fireplace.

The letter was a check for \$100.

With But a Single Thought

